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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000684

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SUBJECT: THE PARTY OF PRIME MINISTERS: DAWA UNITY REMAINS
FRAGILE

REF: 07 BAGHDAD 1436 (DAWA CONFERENCE)

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Islamic Dawa Party, the grandfather of Iraq's Shia religious-based political parties, is no stranger to division, and the latest fissure pits a faction led by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki against a smaller but scrappy camp headed by former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaffri. For well over a year, the two have battled over control of a party that boasts a significant Council of Representatives (CoR) presence and three affiliated provincial governor posts. Unable to formally resolve the Maliki-Jaffri leadership dispute at its April 2007 party congress, Dawa reportedly eliminated the Secretary General position (though this point remains in dispute) and installed a 15-person committee to determine party policy through "collective leadership." Nearly one year later, Maliki supporters claim that the collective leadership mechanism has helped to unify the party, while the Jaffri faction complains that Maliki and a small circle of insiders have squeezed them out and exercise control of Dawa policy through a non-transparent decision making process, a legacy of Dawa's secretive past. Jaffri and his supporters insist that Dawa is united - for now - but are actively seeking to build a broad-based "National Reform Trend" that remains a movement in search of members. As Iraqis turn their attention to prospective provincial elections, Dawa appears to be more a divided, elitist assembly of ambitious individuals than a cohesive party with a broad base of public support, and it will likely need to form electoral alliances to compensate for this. With a historical image that resonates in the Shia community and a relatively weak organization that lacks a large affiliated militia, Dawa could continue to serve as a recruiting pool of future prime ministerial candidates who will be beholden to and thus controllable by larger entities that seek the spoils but not the responsibilities of formal rule. End Summary.

A History of Division and Secrecy

¶2. (C) Founded in 1957 as a Shia-based party dedicated to establishment of an Islamic polity, the Islamic Dawa Party enjoys enduring prestige among Iraq's Shia majority for its efforts to oppose Baathist rule and for the decades of hardship its cadres endured as they were imprisoned, tortured, murdered, and exiled by Saddam's regime. Dawa has also seen its share of splits and fissures over the years. The organizers of Dawa's main current political rival, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), broke from the group in the early days of the party. In later years, Dawa split again over various ideological disputes and the division created "the two Dawas" of today: Dawa Tanzim and Dawa al-Iraq (henceforth referred to as Dawa in this report). Dawa CoR bloc leader Ali al-Adib and senior Dawa CoR member Haidar al-Abadi told us relations between the two Dawas

within the CoR are strong and, while the parties have separate identities, they coordinate closely and vote together on most issues (Dawa Tanzim has 13 CoR seats and Dawa has 12 seats). Both parties remain part of the Shia United Iraqi Alliance. In the provinces, Karbala's governor is a senior Dawa official and the governors of Wasit and Muthanna have close links to the party. Dawa has also distinguished itself as the party of both of post-Saddam Iraq's elected Prime Ministers: Ibrahim al-Jaffri and Nuri al-Maliki.

¶3. (C) Dawa insiders like Abadi and Sheikh Abdulhalim al-Zuhairi, Maliki's spiritual advisor, told us the party experienced internal turmoil after Jaffri was removed as Prime Minister (he reportedly left his post neither easily nor quietly) and replaced by fellow party member Maliki. Jaffri lieutenant Falih al-Fayadh, a Dawa CoR member, confided that Jaffri has never considered Maliki's claimed leadership of the party as "legitimate." The Jaffri-Maliki rivalry reportedly came to a head at the April 2007 Dawa party congress (reftel). Held in the eerie emptiness of the Hotel Rashid's cave-like ballroom, a fitting venue for a party that survived the horrors of Baathist oppression by lurking in the shadows and maintaining a paranoiac level of secrecy, the meeting reportedly drew no more than 100 members. According to Fayadh and Ali al-Alak, a senior Dawa functionary who took Maliki's CoR seat upon the latter's appointment as Prime Minister, the meeting became highly contentious when the matter of choosing a party leader (Secretary General) came up, with the party split into Maliki and Jaffri camps (predictably, representatives of each camp insist that their camp is far larger than the other). Alak, a Maliki supporter, and Jaffri supporter Fayadh told us the group decided after hours of heated haggling that the

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Secretary General post would go unfilled in favor of

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"collective leadership" by a 15-person Central Leadership Committee. We note, however, that the party's website lists Maliki as Secretary General.

¶4. (C) Soundings among Dawa contacts on the efficacy of Dawa's decision-making-by-committee approach reveal that "collective leadership" has not resolved core tension between the two factions. Alak and fellow Central Leadership Committee members Haidar al-Abadi, Ali al-Adib and Sheikh Abdulhalim al-Zuhairi (Maliki supporters all) told us collective leadership is working well and contributing to party unity. Sheikh Abdulhalim confided that Maliki and other senior Dawa officials asked him to lead rapprochement efforts with Jaffri, and he boasted that his initial efforts have been successful. Jaffri supporter Falih al-Fayadh sang a different tune entirely, complaining that Committee decisions regarding Dawa policy are often trumped by unilateral directives issued by Maliki in consultation with a small circle of advisors, who are trying to squeeze Jaffri out of the party. Fayadh asserted that this and other aspects of Maliki's style are rooted in Dawa's experience of victimization and exile: "Dawa needed secrecy then but our circumstances have changed," he stated "and we must change also." Fayadh claimed Maliki is afraid that transparency will doom his position both within the party and as Prime Minister ("the Kurds often whisper to Maliki that 'we can destroy you, just like we destroyed Jaffri'"), and he declared that Jaffri "and most of the party" remain deeply unhappy with Dawa's direction.

Jaffri's "National Reform Trend:" Help Wanted

¶5. (C) Always coy and cagey, Jaffri was particularly slippery when we have asked him directly about the state of Dawa unity and his relations with Maliki, insisting that Dawa remains one party before he launched into a meandering and abstract

soliloquy on the true import of the word "fissure." Fayadh clarified that while Dawa is one party - for now, anyway - it is comprised of two streams: Maliki's camp and Jaffri's "National Reform Trend," a fledgling group that seeks to build a broad Shia-Sunni base that rejects ISCI-style federalism, supports a strong central government, and advocates a hard line on perceived Kurdish overreaching.

With regard to region formation, Jaffri envisions a strong central government presiding over one undivided Arab region and one Kurdish region, arguing that the two-region approach will best promote national unity, limit interference by Iran and Iraq's Arab neighbors, and mollify Sunni fears that they will be deprived of resource wealth or their heritage.

Fayadh claimed that the "National Reform Trend" should be thought of as a vehicle for Shia and Sunni political groups with common goals, rather than as a formal party with a fixed ideology. Fayadh predicted the "Trend" will draw support from all UIA elements except ISCI as well as secular Iraqiyah and Sunni Tawafiq members, and we hear continued reports that Jaffri is trying to entice the Sadrists into his fold. For now, however, the "National Reform Trend" appears to remain a movement in search of members.

Comment

¶6. (C) As Iraqis turn their attention to prospective provincial elections, Dawa appears to be more an elitist assemblage of ambitious and often bickering individuals than a cohesive party with a broad base of public support, and the party will likely need to form electoral alliances to compensate for this. Haidar al-Abadi and Prime Minister Maliki's Chief of Staff, Tareq Abdullah, told us the party is already sizing up coalition scenarios in various provinces. The relatively low turnout at Dawa's April 2007 party congress may suggest that the party has not undertaken a strong, grass-roots rebuilding effort since 2003 and may need strong alliance partners to upset the predictions of Shia political rivals such as Fadhlila Party bloc leader Hassan al-Shammari, who told us with apparent conviction that Dawa will do well to win a single seat in the Shia south/center due to widespread public dissatisfaction with the dismal performance of two successive Dawa-led central governments. Dawa will likely remain a fixture in national Shia politics and could continue to serve as a talent pool for future prime ministerial candidates - possibly beginning with CoR bloc leader Ali al-Adib - since party officials have ideal qualifications to head a Shia-majority government in the new Iraq: they represent Iraq's pioneer Shia Islamist party with a proud history of "martyrdom;" Dawa lacks a large affiliated militia that can compete with ISCI's Badr or Sadr's Jaysh al-Mehdi; and the party is small and weak enough to ensure that its candidate will be beholden to and thus controllable by larger entities that seek the spoils but not the

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responsibilities of formal rule.
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